

**Testimony of Dr. John Clifford
Deputy Administrator for
Veterinary Services**

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

United States Department of Agriculture

**Before the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture
July 22, 2004**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing on animal identification. As you know, on April 27, Secretary Veneman announced the transfer of \$18.8 million from USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to provide initial funding needed to begin development and deployment of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). Plus, the President's fiscal year 2005 budget includes another \$33 million for these efforts. Once fully operational, the NAIS will help USDA and our State and industry partners quickly identify any livestock or agricultural premises exposed to a foreign animal disease so that the disease can be contained and eradicated. This will benefit producers as well as consumers.

Background on animal identification systems

The increasing number of animal disease outbreaks that have been reported around the globe over the past decade, and the BSE-positive cow found in Washington State last December, have intensified public interest in putting in place a national animal identification program to protect animal health. The European Union, Canada and Australia all have some type of animal

identification system already in place. A strong U.S. identification system is a necessary component of our nation's agricultural infrastructure.

Of course, animal identification is not a new concept in the United States. In the 1940's, when livestock identification was first used to indicate ownership and deter theft, the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) initiated an extensive animal identification program to identify cattle vaccinated for brucellosis. The official brucellosis vaccination tag with an ear tattoo provided the U.S. with a highly successful animal identification program for cattle for many years (although it is now on its way to extinction because that program is quickly approaching its successful conclusion.) A number of other animal health programs also include an animal identification component. And, certain classes of livestock must be officially identified before entering interstate commerce. So there are multiple systems in place that all exist for different purposes, but there is no nationwide animal identification system for all animals of any given species.

Animal identification systems have merit for producers for other reasons as well, including performance recording and marketing opportunities. However, APHIS is focused on animal ID for one principal reason: to establish the animal information foundation we need to support our animal disease control, eradication, monitoring and surveillance programs. Livestock producers recognize that finding potentially sick or exposed animals early in a disease outbreak is essential to containing the disease quickly. The NAIS would allow for rapid tracing of livestock in the event of an outbreak, helping to limit the scope and expense of the outbreak and allowing us to minimize impact on domestic and foreign markets. The NAIS will also be critical as we work to complete the disease eradication programs in which we have invested many years and millions of dollars.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of the National Animal Identification System is to have the capability to identify all animals and premises that have had direct contact with a foreign animal disease (FAD) or disease of concern within 48 hours after discovery. USDA believes this goal can best be achieved by focusing on the following objectives:

- First, we don't want to burden producers with multiple identification numbers, processes, or requirements. What we, together with our industry and State partners, have envisioned is very simple: a system where every premise has a unique 7-character identifier. And every animal needing to be identified individually would have a 15-character number. Many producers are already asking to make a move to this numbering system from the multiple systems currently in use, so we are planning to pursue rulemaking to recognize for official use both the 7-character premises ID number and the 15-character Animal Identification Number. This will allow those who want to start the migration to do so, while not requiring it for others who may not be ready.
- Second, there is no "one size fits all" technology. It is likely that some technologies will work better for some species than for others. Rather than focus on a specific technology, the USDA will focus on the design of the identification system—what information should be collected and when it should be collected. Once the identification system is designed, the market will determine which technologies will be the most appropriate to meet the needs of the system.

- Third, the NAIS should be built upon national data standards to ensure that a uniform system evolves. The system also must not preclude producers from being able to use it in coordination with production management systems that respond to market incentives.
- Fourth, the architecture for the system should be created without unduly increasing the role and the size of the government. Both public and private funding will be required for the NAIS to become fully operational. Database systems must be developed and maintained, equipment must be purchased, animals must be identified and tracked, programs must be monitored, and labor is needed for all these activities.

The identification of premises and animals, while requiring significant resources, is a fundamental and straightforward objective. However, collecting and reporting animal movement information to establish a “travel record” of each animal’s life is an enormous undertaking, requiring significant development and testing and substantial infrastructure. Because of its complexity, we plan on phasing in the NAIS to provide a timely and cost-effective program while ensuring it is functional, practical, and reliable. Initially, the program will be implemented on a voluntary basis, but we may eventually require premise and animal identification.

The U.S. cattle population is our first priority, although the system will eventually focus on all livestock within the represented industries.

Clearly the development of a system of this kind of scope and complexity, requiring a substantial investment on the part of both the public and private sectors, needs to be developed with ample opportunity for input by those affected. In addition to our ongoing dialogue with industry and States on the subject, we are holding listening sessions around the country and on

July 9, we published an advance notice of proposed rulemaking that, among other things, solicits comments on when and under what circumstances the NAIS should move from being voluntary to mandatory, and which species should be covered now and over the long term.

NAIS Implementation Plan Overview

USDA's priority in 2004 is to establish the Premises Identification System. Starting next month, States and Tribes on a limited bases can begin registering locations where livestock are held, sold, or commingled, using an interim standardized premises registration system provided by APHIS, or systems developed by themselves or others that meet NAIS data standards. APHIS is taking advantage of the work done under an Agency cooperative agreement by the Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium, which was identified by an independent contractor as a premises registration system that met the established data standards and offered the necessary computing needs at the national level. The contractor reviewed 3 systems supported by Federal funding. We are also evaluating other systems that states or third parties have developed to ensure their compliance with NAIS data standards.

APHIS will provide close to \$12 million to States and Tribes through cooperative agreements this year to help them implement premises identification as well as to carry out field trials or research to test and fine-tune technologies and collect animal movement data. The deadline for States and Tribes to submit applications for cooperative agreements was July 15. The evaluation of the applications will be completed quickly so that selected projects can be initiated in early August. As mentioned earlier, the President's fiscal year 2005 budget calls for \$33 million in funding for animal identification, and a portion of this money would go toward

establishing additional cooperative agreements to assist States and Tribes that don't receive funding this year.

USDA is also gearing up for a substantial education and outreach campaign aimed toward producers. Next month, an outside contractor will be carrying out benchmark survey research to determine how much producers know about animal identification. We will develop a targeted communication plan based on the outcome of this research, focusing on the need for animal identification and explaining how interested producers can register their premises.

As mentioned earlier, Under Secretary Bill Hawks is also holding a series of 14 listening sessions around the nation to provide public forums to discuss animal identification. Listening sessions have been held in North Carolina, Georgia, Oregon, California, and New Mexico. The next one is scheduled to take place on July 23 in Pasco, WA. We are posting comments from these sessions on our website so that interested parties can keep abreast of developments.

In 2005, USDA plans on further developing the animal identification system so that it provides efficient collection of animal movement data. Additionally, we will also continue our communication and education efforts, address regulatory needs, and work with Congress on any legislative needs.

We envision that the NAIS will continue to expand in 2006. As States and Tribes gain experience, USDA will integrate those approaches that are most successful into the broader

system. We will also allow service providers and other participants to gear up their products, programs and services to meet the demands of a national program.

USDA is aware of producers' concerns about the confidentiality of information collected in the animal identification system and is taking them very seriously as we explore the most effective means for collecting animal identification information.

Throughout the development of a national system, our goal is to be as transparent as possible so that producers understand both the responsibilities and benefits that will result. We look forward to working with and hearing from the Nation's producers, industry, animal health officials, State governments, and Congress to successfully achieve a national animal identification system. We also want to thank you, Chairman Hayes, and your entire subcommittee for all of your efforts to advance this vital initiative for agriculture. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have at this time.